Title: EXPLORING FORMS OF SOCIAL CONSERVATISM IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN AND GEORGE SAND

Name of Scholar: Anindita Saha

Name of Supervisor: Professor Nilanjan Chakrabarti

REGISTRATION NO : VB-1725 OF 2014-15

Date of Registration: SEP. 8, 2014

Synopsis

In my thesis I will attempt to explore forms of social conservatism in the novels of the late 18th century or early 19thcentury English novelist Jane Austen and the 19th century French novelist Amantine –Lucil –Aurore Dupin, better known as George sand and will attempt to explore whether the novelist supported the forms or reacted against the forms of social conservatism in their lives and works.

Both the novelists have been much worked on by scholars down the centuries and they continue to be popular choice. A lot of papers have focused on the various issues dealt with in Jane Austen's works, namely marriage and courtship, money and inheritance, gender discrimination, appearance and reality, education and accomplishments, ownership and estate, feminism, Marxism etc. Similarly, the issues of social constraints, adultery, marriage, sex, feminism, socialism etc, in the novels of George Sand have been addressed in various papers.

But a comparative study of the novels of Jane Austen and the novels of George Sand has not been done in detail. The present dissertation stems from this lacuna in research and aims to bring out the similarities and dissimilarities existing between the two novelists by exploring forms social conservatism in their novels and their attitude towards it.

Before going to compare the two novelists belonging to two different countries efforts should be made to understand what the term 'social conservatism' refers to. Social conservatism is an ideology that focuses on the preservation of what are seen as traditional values. The accepted goals and ideologies related to preserving traditions and morality often vary from group to group within social conservatism. Thus there are really no policies or positions that could be considered universal among social conservationists. There are, however, a number of general principles to which at least a majority of social conservatives adhere, such as support for traditional family values.

Now the very term social conservatism reminds us of feminism though the term was not used then .Feminism is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality , rights and justice .Feminist literary and cultural theory draws a link between the representation of women in art and the real ,material conditions in which they live. Feminism's key political and theoretical stance is this :the inequalities that exist between men and women are not natural but social ,not pre-ordained but created by men so that they retain power. Religion, family ,education , arts ,knowledge systems are all social and cultural structures that enable the perpetual reinforcement of this inequality .These structures are effective means of reinforcing male domination because they do not appear oppressive. They retain power because with their ability to persuade, the structures convince the woman that

she is destined to be subordinated. Cultural structures are, therefore, ideological: providing a system of beliefs that seek and attain the woman's consent to be subordinated. Feminist theory works to unpack these ideologies of dominance. It analyses gender relations: how gender relations are constructed and experienced by both men and women .Toril Moi is emphatic that feminist criticism is a political project: 'Feministcriticism. . . is a specific kind of political discourse ,a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism(204]

Now the similarity between the two novelists are that they both advocated for women's right to manage their own lives. Austen lived in a time when the very notion that women could hold rational opinions and manage their own affairs was highly controversial and while Austen is certainly not a radical in the sense Mary Wollstonecraft is, she repeatedly demonstrates that women who are slaves to emotion or who follow the dictates of social expectations over their own intelligence, cannot thrive.

Fanny, the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, is accused of ingratitude for refusing to marry according to her guardian's wish, yet her decision is shown to be correct and her guardian eventually recognises her superior judgement. In fact Austen promotes the idea that women's decision and choices are equally important to men's. Both Mr. Collins' and Mr, Darcy's proposals to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* fail due to their misunderstandings of her feelings of self respect. Elizabeth could not respect herself if she married Mr. Collins. Likewise, her sense of self respect, her views of her family, is strong enough to refuse a socially –enticing marriage with Darcy. Darcy is stunned to be turned down. This sense that women's right to self determination is more important than the desires of a man is right up in the novels of Jane Austen.

Her interest in how women should support themselves is also clear---she sees marriage as the only option for a non –financially independent woman because they do not inherit property. Emma in the novel *Emma* states that there is no need for her to marry, because she is financially stable. Austen does wholeheartedly believe that men and women should be companions to each other .The fact that she wants women to make choices based on love as well as financial reasons asserts both their ability to make rational choices and their right to pursue happiness. And that was pretty rebellious for the time. But at the same time, it is to be noted here that marriage is a form of social conservatism and Jane Austen never went against it. Rather marriage forms a strong themes in all her novels and Emma who declared that there is no need for her to marry , marries Mr. Knightley at the end of the novel. Jane Austen also never utters a word against class hierarchy presented in her society and in her works.

On the other hand , a major figure in the second wave of Romantic writers in France, which introduced Victor Hugo, Alfred de Musset, Balzac and others, Sand was defined by her rebellious nature. Her transvestism was a powerful manifestation of revolt against the establishment and its mores. In particular, she attacked arranged marriages which she had endured. Thousands of women identified with the despair of sand's heroine, Indiana, trapped in a loveless arranged marriage. They were shaken by the tragic fate of the aristocratic valentine and her lover from a class 'beneath' hers. They became victims of authoritarianism and class discrimination. *Lelia*, a novel by Sand, published in 1833, shocked contemporary readers with a heroine who like Sand herself was an iconoclastic, intellectual woman who scorned society's rules. An idealist, rather than a feminist, sand called for social reform and equality among the classes, goals that had not been attained by the revolution of 1789.she greatly advocated for the women's right to divorce.

It is to be noted here that the reaction against social conservatism is not always overt in the novels of Austen and it is also apparent in her novels that she suggested through her characters a kind of adjustment with society . But Sand is radical in her rebellion against

social conservatism which provides a woman a very subservient roles, and her radicalism is very overt in her novels.

There are so many dissimilarities between the two novelists. Their lives, their society in which they live, their families, are completely opposite to each other. Jane Austen(1775-1817) was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction, set among the landed gentry , earned her a place as one of the most widely read writers in English literature. She lived her entire life as part of a close-knit family located on the lower fringes of the English landed gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and elder brothers as well as through her own reading. The support of her family was critical to her development as a professional writer. Her works critique the novels of sentimentality of the 2nd half of the 18th century and are part of the transition to 19th century realism. Her plots highlight the tragic position of women of her society. The women have to depend on marriage to secure social standing and economic security.

But the French novelist George Sand's life was completely different from the life of Jane Austen. Her father, Maurice Dupin, was the grandson of the Marshal General of France and her mother was a commoner. At the age of 18, she married Casimir Dudevant, illegitimate son of a Baron. In early 1831, she left her husband and entered upon a four or five year period on ''Romantic Rebellion''. In 1835 she was legally separated from Dudevant and took her children with her. She was also known for her writings during the Paris Commune where she took position for the Versailles assembly against the "commurades''urging them to take violent action against the 'rebels'. She is equally known for her much publicized romantic affairs with a number of artists including the composer Frederic Chopin and Alfred de Musset. She was also notorious for smoking cigar in public and for wearing man's dresses. Sand was also a prolific writer.

In my study on the comparison of the two novelists I will resort to an interpretative and analytical method. My objective in this dissertation is a close textual analysis as opposed to drawing upon the plethora of criticism available. I intend to divide my dissertation into five chapters:

The introductory chapter will introduce the theme of my search and I will attempt to explain the title of my thesis. I will explain which methodological theory is applicable to my work. As feminism is applicable, I will discuss at length the theory relating to my research. In this respect relevant biographical details will be integrated. I will try to show how my research works stands apart from other critical works. Chapterisation like a resume also to be included here. As my research envelops two cultures, I must try to uphold the main cultural issues of the then societies.

Chapter two will make a comparison between Austen's life and Sand's. Austen's personal life, her achievement, her contribution to English literature, her difference from her contemporaries in respect of theme and treatment and what the critics belonging to different schools have said about her works will be compared with Sand's and how much their lives are reflected in their novels will also be discussed.

Chapter three will make a comparative study between the social and political history and status of women at the time of Jane Austen and George Sand with reference to their heroines.

Fourth chapter will explore the forms of social conservatism present in the novels of Austen and Sand and will trace how these forms affected the lives of the heroines of the two novelists and how they rais their voice against social conservatism.In*Leila*, the heroine scorns society's rules. In this novel Sand advocates the same standard of morality for men and women and suggests that both the prostitute and the married women were slaves to male desire. Sand also questions monogamy,fidelity and romantic celibacy through the persona of Lelia. Indiana'' is a direct transcript of sand's personal experience. it shows the enslavement

of a wife under an inhuman husband . Sand's *Valentine* is a hyperbolic critique of the institution of marriage. This chapter will also explore how the female characters of Sand try to get rid of the bond of marriage sans love and fail to get divorce because of state rules. On the other hand , Austen through the persona of her heroines and her subtle irony express her indignation to the patriarchal society. But she is not radical like Sand. A kind of compromise with society is there in her novels.

The Fifth chapter will summarise and conclude the dissertation by highlighting the findings of my research.

Thus though an effort will be made to be thorough in the comparison of the two novelists, any discerning reader may find further scope for research in this area. Their novels are open to countless interpretations and offer immense scope for deep analysis. Issues of Christian Values, class hierarchy , consumer culture , rank and consequence , expectation and disappointment , role of economics in marriage are dealt in these novels and merit a detailed analysis.

Working Bibliography

Austen , Jane.*Emma*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd, 2004 . Print.

---.*Mansfield Park*. New Delhi : UBS Publishers' distributors Pvt Ltd, 2004. Print.

---.*Northanger Abbey*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt Ltd , 2004. Print.

---.*Persuasion*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd. 2004. Print.

---*Pride and Prejudice*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt Ltd. 2004. Print.

---*Sense and Sensibility*. New Delhi: UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd. 2004. Print.

Bhatt, Sharmila. "Women and Marriage in Pride and Prejudice". *Jane Austen : An Anthology of Recent Criticism***.**Ed. Harish Trivedi. Delhi: Pencraft Internationl, 1996. Print

Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster, ed: *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Auste*n. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.1997. Print.

Doumic, Rene.George Sand: Some Aspects of Her Life and Writings. Trans. Gerard Hopkins. Harmondsworth : Penguin Books Ltd. 1953. Print.

Honan, Park. Jane Austen: Her Life. New York : St. Martin's P, 1987. Print.

Light , Alison.Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars. London: Routledge.1991. Print.

Moi, Toril. French Feminist Thought. London:Wiley-Blackwell, 1987. Print.

Moses, Claire Goldberg. French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century. Albany: State U of New York P.1984. Print.

Muller, Jerry Z, Ed. Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present. Princeton: Princeton U.P.1997. Print.

Sand , George. Consuelo. Trans. Frank H.Potter. New York: DODD, MEAD and Company.1889. Internet Archive. Web.20 Nov.2014<.http://trove. nla.gov.au>

---.Indiana. Trans. Naomi Schor.South Australia: U of Adelaide. Web.5 March, 2014<http:// ebooks. adelaide.edu.au/s/sand/george/Indiana/part 5.html>

---.Lelia.Trans.Maria Espinosa.Bloomington:Indiana UP.1978.Print.

---Mauprat.Trans.Stanley Young.South Australia: U of Australia. Web. 5 March, 2014 < http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/sand/george/mauprat/index.html>

Trivedi, Harish,ed. Jane Austen: An Anthology of Recent Criticism. Delhi: Pencraft International.1996.

Weiss, John. Conservatism in Europe 1770-1945:Traditionalism, Reaction and Counter-Revolution. London: Thames and Hudson.1977. Print

Work Cited

Bhatt, Sharmila. '' Women and Marriage in Pride and Prejudice.''*Jane Austen: An Anthology ofRecent Criticism***.**Ed. Harish Trivedi. Delhi: PencraftInternationl, 1996. Print

Honan,Park.*JaneAusten:HerLife*.NewYork:St.Martin's P,1987.Print

Moi,Toril.*French Feminist Thought*.London:Wiley-Blackwell,1987.Print